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EDITORIAL NOTES

To a careful observer there are many signs of unrest in the field of secondary education. Our school journals, our literary magazines, and occasionally a book give evidence of a spirit of dissatisfaction with the situation as it is. It would be easy to interpret this restlessness merely as a sign of life. So much indeed it is. And in so far as this indicates an unwillingness to accept the present order of things with its results, there is not only proof of life but promise of progress. The distressing feature of the matter is that there seems to be no clear recognition of the fundamental causes of this unrest and of the steps to be taken to relieve it by an intelligent organization and direction of the energies at work in the field.

Some of the signs and symptoms of this unrest are of long standing. There is the cry of inefficiency. The method of revealing this weakness is commonly to take a set of examination papers written by candidates for admission to college or professional school, and by careful analysis and well-chosen example to make a plausible case against our whole system of secondary education. Without questioning the facts or the validity of the analysis, one would be justified in asking the question which such articles usually fail to raise as to whether precisely this test is what the schools were really trying to fit the pupils for, and as to what value such a test could have under the circumstances. Again, there is the cry of overburdening. This is the antiphony to the cry of inefficiency. The colleges are demanding too much of some things and too many things in all. Well-trained, hard-working, and conscientious men do not like to be told that they are inefficient. They are quite likely to look about for reasons why, and for relief if the reasons are beyond their control and within the control of those who lay the charge. If too much is demanded, the demand should be lowered. But the mere quantitative reduction in requirement in a single subject or in the total number does not relieve a difficulty that is not one primarily of time and effort, but rather of fundamental aim and of rational organization to achieve that aim.

Then there is the effort to secure uniformity. The teachers of the classics are asking that all colleges set the same requirements in Latin. The teachers of physics are attempting to define what shall constitute the first unit in this science. If the secondary schools are to be judged by the different colleges on the basis of the knowledge shown by their pupils of specific facts or laws within these fields, it is undoubtedly necessary again to have the requirements fixed and uniform for all. But if the college in thus

fixing and determining the work of the school interferes with the higher and persistent aim of the school, what then? Within the past year there has arisen in several of our western states a movement to transfer the right of approving secondary schools from university authorities to the state department of education. Whatever may be the mixed motives leading to this movement, it seems clear that the chief and impelling desire is to give to the secondary schools a much-needed opportunity to define for themselves and to carry out their own purposes.

It is no easy task to analyze with surety a contemporaneous movement and no one man is competent to do so. It is imperative, however, that from time to time such attempts be made. If the time be ripe, such an attempt to see ahead can do no harm and is in no way more dangerous than idly to yield to present conditions. Such a time is on us. We must for the sake of the schools, for the heightening of our efficiency, for the improvement of our scholarship and the enlargement of our own vision face squarely the real problems suggested by these signs and symptoms, and do our best to solve them. Our secondary education is at a crisis.

W. B. O.

A CRISIS